

1925 California Diamond Jubilee Half Dollar



1925 mintage of 150,200, 200 for assay. 63,606 coins were returned to the Mint for melting. Designed by Jo Mora, of Carmel, CA, and distributed by the San Francisco and Los Angeles Clearing House Associations. Colonel George Filmer accepted the chairmanship of the Jubilee Official Coin Committee. Image courtesy of Pinnacle Rarities.

Approved by Congress on February 24, 1925 and issued in commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the admission of California into the Union.

Design:

Obverse: Depicts a prospector kneeling to left with a gold miner's pan in his quest for gold, symbolic of the 'forty-niners.' On the bottom it states CALIFORNIA DIAMOND JUBILEE – 1925. At the top is seen LIBERTY. To the left is seen IN GOD WE TRUST.

Reverse: Depicts the state emblem of California with a grizzly bear as the central image. The grizzly was also used on the California Republic bear flag under General John C. Fremont. At the top is seen E PLURIBUS UNUM. Below the bear it states UNITED STATES OF AMERICA – HALF DOLLAR.

In 1925, President Calvin Coolidge signed a bill authorizing the coinage of half-dollars for three celebrations. This was the first time that an authorizing Act of Congress covered more than one issue.

This Act called for half-dollars to commemorate:

The one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Bennington, and the Independence of Vermont.

The seventy-fifth anniversary of the admission of the State of California into the Union.

The one hundredth anniversary of the founding of Fort Vancouver, in the State of Washington.

“ . . . Chairman Rossi craved bringing into being a coin commemorating the California Diamond Jubilee. Rep. John Raker (D-CA) wanted to help make this objective a reality. Nevertheless, the Bureau of the Mint was directly opposed to additional keepsake production. In fact, it prejudiced the thinking of Rep Albert H. Vestal of the House Coinage Committee to share in its credence. On January 9, 1925, Senators Dale and Green (R-VT) introduced a bill calling for the creation of a Vermont gold dollar and 50-cent piece.

By January 24, it was decided to eliminate the larger denomination. On February 16, Rep. Raker offered to amend their bill further, by authorizing the California souvenir coin. This bill was further amended by Rep. Albert Johnson (R-WA), attempting to authorize production of the Fort Vancouver coinage. Authorization was signed by President Coolidge, whose boyhood home is located at Plymouth Notch, Vermont! Thus, we have the first instance within the series where an authorizing Act (Public Law No. 452-68) covered more than one issue. . . ”¹



“ . . . It was decided that a resident of California sculptor should be chosen as the designer, and the work later was entrusted to Mr. Jo Mora of Carmel, a man whose work had amply demonstrated his fitness for the choice. Mora naturally endeavored to produce a composition typically Californian. Selecting the grizzly bear for the reverse side, he was at some loss to decide upon an appropriate symbol for the face. After making several suggestions and considering those put forward by members of the Jubilee Committee, it was decided that a miner panning gold from the stream would be most acceptable. Drawings were made and sent to Washington. These received approval from the Treasury Department with the exception of slight changes in the posture of the miner, which were easily effected.

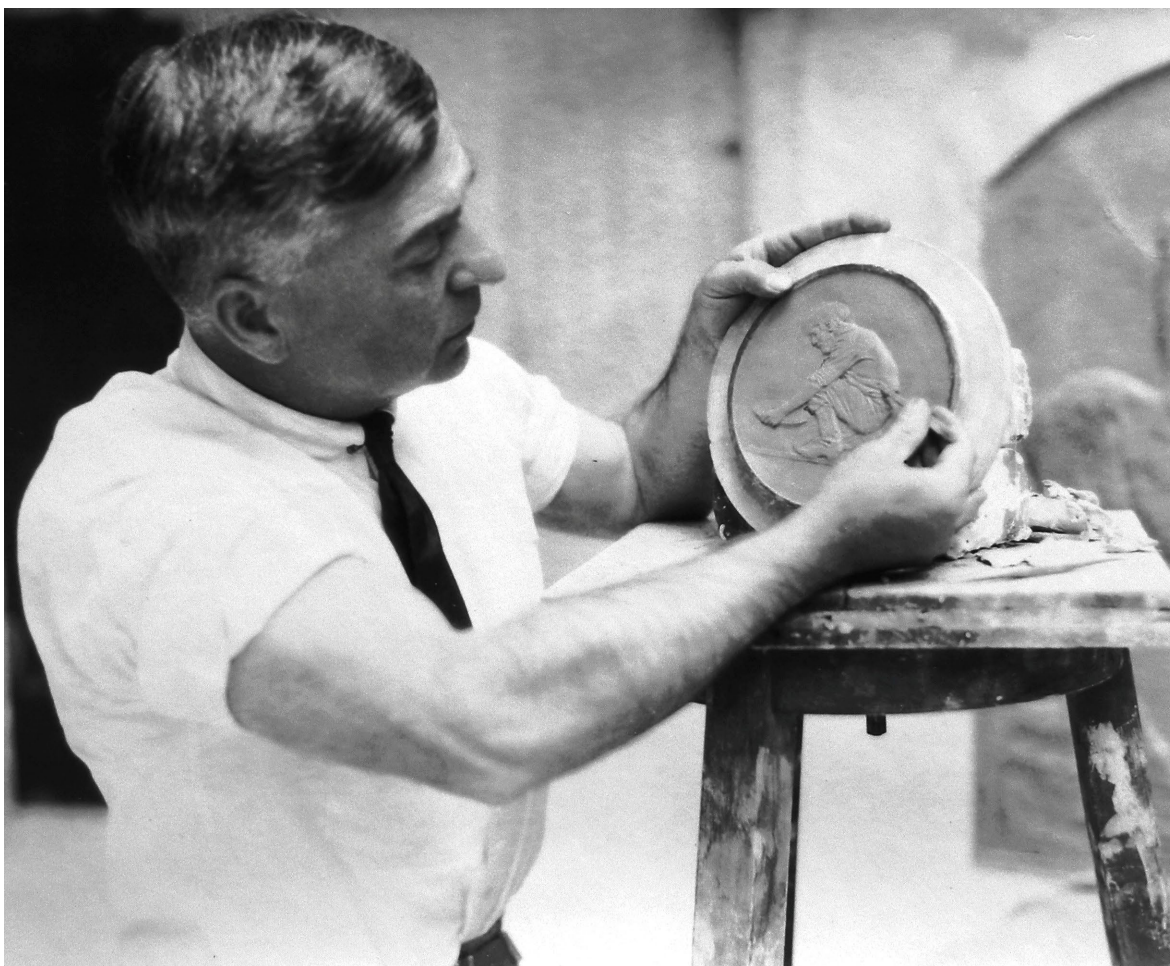
Mr. Mora proceeded to carry out in sculpture the composition in the sketches. On plaster dies seven inches in diameter, he modeled in wax the two faces of the design, so that no part of the sculpture projected beyond the outside rim. The next step was to make plaster molds, the lettering having been carved in reverse so that when the cast was made it would come out properly in relief. These plaster casts were shipped from San Francisco by airmail to the United States Mint at Philadelphia where they were reduced to dies

of the final size. The dies then were forwarded by airmail to the San Francisco Mint. . .



Rough sketches by Jo Mora. Courtesy of The Commission of Fine Arts.

¹ *The Commemorative Trail*, The Journal of the Society for U.S. Commemorative Coins, 1925 California Diamond Jubilee, Fall/Winter 1999 – Vol. 16., No. 1 & 2.



Jo Mora in his studio with model of the obverse of the coin.

Courtesy of the U. S. Commission of Fine Arts.

Minutes of Meeting held in Washington, D.C., May 21, 1925.

The following members were present:

Mr. Moore, Chairman,
Mr. Greenleaf,
Mr. Ayres,
Mr. Mowbray,
Mr. Medary,
Mr. Delano,
Mr. Taft

Also Mr. H. P. Caemmerer, Secretary and Executive Officer.

California Diamond Jubilee Coin:

Under date of May 8, 1925, the Director of the Mint submitted a sketch for the proposed design for a fifty-cent piece to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the admission of the State of California into the Union. For one side of the coin a gold digger was suggested and for the other a 'California' bear.

The Commission thought these symbols would be possible if they were interestingly executed, but on the other hand there might be something which would be far more interesting and with a bigger sense of what California really is. The work indicated that the artist has not had the proper experience to do a successful coin. The bear was designed entirely too short and the whole sketch seemed amateurish.

The Commission recommended that the work be placed in the hands of Mr. Robert I. Aitken, Sculptor, of New York City. (**Exhibit B**).

Exhibit B

May 22, 1925.

Dear Sir:

The Commission of Fine Arts, at their meeting yesterday, considered the design, submitted by you with your letter of May 8th, for the proposed souvenir half dollar to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the admission of the State of California into the Union.

The Commission disapproved the sketch submitted. The figures of the design are not in good proportion, and the sketch would indicate that the designer has not had experience in medallic art. The symbols used would be acceptable if they were interestingly executed, but on the other hand, there might be something which would be far more interesting and with a bigger sense of what California really is.

The Commission recommend that the work of making a satisfactory design and models for the California souvenir coin be placed in the hands of Mr. Robert I. Aitken, 154 West 55th Street, New York City. Mr. Aitken is a native of California and one of the eminent men in his profession in this country.

The design which you submitted and a rough sketch, showing suggested changes in the design, are enclosed.

Very respectfully, yours,
H. P. Caemmerer,

Secretary and Executive Officer

Hon. R. J. Grant,
Director of the Mint
Washington, D. C.

To the Director of the Mint Robert Grant from the Chairman of the Citizen's Committee California Diamond Jubilee [sic] Angelo Rossi on June 1, 1925, regarding the California Diamond Jubilee Half Dollar.

The Citizens' Committee arranging San Francisco's celebration of California's Diamond Jubilee has received the report of the Fine Arts Commission disapproving, the souvenir coin design submitted May 8th and recommending that Mr. Robert I. Aitken, New York, be employed to make the design. Of the design submitted, the report says:

'The figures of the design are not in good proportion. The symbols used would be acceptable if they were interestingly executed. The Commission recommends that the work of making a satisfactory design and models for the California souvenir coin be placed in the hands of Mr. Robert I. Aitken, New York City.' The Citizens' Committee has communicated with Mr. Aitken by telegram and today received from him the following telegram in reply:

'Will make designs, models and furnish mint with necessary hubs for fifty cent piece so that coin can be ready in time for celebration for twenty five hundred dollars.'

The San Francisco Citizens Committee desires, if possible, to avoid incurring this expenditure of \$250.00 for a coin design. Mr. Jo Mora was engaged by the Committee, for a nominal fee, to make the coin design. He is a sculptor of note, resident in California. Many pieces of fine sculpture, in and around San Francisco, distinctly Californian, are his work. His design for the coin was passed upon by a committee of Californians versed in the history of the state.

Time does not permit the preparation of another design here to submit for the approval of the Fine Arts commission. Moreover, it would be extremely difficult, under the circumstances, to secure the services of another California artist or not to undertake the work.

In its note of disapproval of the design submitted the Fine Arts Commission adds: 'The design which you submitted and a rough sketch showing suggested changes are enclosed.'

We have decided to have the suggested changes made and re-submit Mr. Mora's design for your approval and adoption. If it is still, found unsatisfactory we are confronted with the alternative of abandoning the idea of a souvenir coin or placing the design in the hands of Mr. Aitken and paying a fee of \$2,500.00.

Neither alternative is attractive. The Diamond Jubilee, seventy-fifth anniversary of the state's admission to the Union, is an event of very great interest and importance to California. The Congress of the United States authorized the mintage of a souvenir coin to commemorate the anniversary.

The San Francisco Citizens' Committee relies upon your help and cooperation in this matter of the souvenir coin, a matter in which we must confess an utter lack of experience. Any help you may be able to extend will be greatly appreciated, I assure you.

To the Director of the Mint Robert Grant from the Chairman of the Citizen's Committee California Diamond Jubilee [sic] Angelo Rossi on June 17, 1925, regarding the California Diamond Jubilee Half Dollar.

We are submitting to you to-day, by air mail, the revised design for the souvenir half-dollar authorized by Congress to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the admission of the State of California into the Union.

The changes which the Fine Arts Commission, in a rough sketch, suggested should be made in design first submitted have been made by the original designer, Jo Mora, sculptor, Carmel.

The Citizens' Committee planning San Francisco's celebration of California's Diamond Jubilee trusts sincerely that the revised design now submitted will be approved by the Fine Arts Commission.

Since the celebration here in San Francisco, which will climax a great number of celebrations throughout the state during the summer, will take place during the week of September 5th to September 12th, time has become an important factor in our plans. We would appreciate, therefore as prompt action as possible by the Fine Arts Commission and a telegram (collect) giving its verdict. On receipt of the Fine Arts Commission's report all other preparatory work to be done on the souvenir Coin design will go forward with the utmost speed.

The following memorandum to Lorado Taft from the Secretary of the Commission of Fine Arts H.R [sic] Caemmerer on June 20, 1926 [sic], regarding the California Diamond Jubilee Half Dollar.

California Jubilee Committee have forwarded through Director of the Mint a revised sketch for their memorial coin by same man who did original. They have not secured Aitken because of the fee requested by him. You recall Commission said the work should be placed in hands of a competent medalist. Revised sketch is little better than first. Shall I disapprove it and advise the Director of the Mint accordingly? Please wire answer collect.

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² *The Authoritative Reference on Commemorative Coins 1892-1954*, by Kevin Flynn, published by Kyle Vick, 2008, p. 65, 264, 265.

These plaster casts were shipped from San Francisco by airmail to the United States Mint at Philadelphia where they were reduced to dies of the final size. The dies then were forwarded by airmail to the San Francisco Mint

On arrival there, twenty Jubilee coins were struck in the presence of the Hon. J. Emmet Hayden, representing the mayor; Hon. Angelo J. Rossi, Chairman of the Executive Committee; Hon. Lewis F. Byington, Chairman of the Program Committee; Federal and Municipal officers; M. J. Kelly, Superintendent of the Mint, and notables from all parts of California. . .



From the Grading Room: Matte Proof 1925-S California Half Dollar, posted on 6/24/2008. Recently certified by NGC is this previously unreported Matte Proof 1925-S California Half Dollar. This coin commemorates the 75th anniversary of California's statehood, and features two motifs which embody California of the 1850's: a gold prospector and a grizzly bear.

Matte proof commemorative half dollars were specially prepared for presentation although in most cases very little documentation exists to illuminate their true purpose. The design, rim, and notably the legends on this coin are very crisply struck, much more so than on a business-strike example of the issue. Inherent of proof coinage of this type, it does not possess reflective luster; rather the entire design has a very uniform appearance. Matte proofs allowed designers to showcase the design elements of the coin, and were "fashionable" during the early Twentieth Century.

From the Grading Room is an occasional feature on this site in which we highlight some of the unusual, interesting, and special coins submitted to NGC for certification. You can also learn more about the California Diamond Jubilee Half Dollar in the NGC Coin Encyclopedia.



1925 California Diamond Jubilee Citizens Committee Ribbon.

"Between August 12 and 26, 1925, 150,200 pieces of the California Diamond Jubilee issue were produced at the San Francisco Mint. They were offered for sale at \$1.00 each by the San Francisco Clearing House Association and the Los Angeles Clearing House Association. The first coin struck was presented to the museum located in Golden Gate Park. (I contacted them they do not have the coin-LG) Also 494 coins were donated to children born on the Diamond Jubilee date (September 9, 1925).

Unfortunately, 63,606 pieces were returned to the Mint and destroyed. Chairman Rossi had requested that the San Francisco Mint produce 100 special presentation pieces. He got his wish. One pair of dies had its fields polished to what we might label a bright, chrome-like reflectivity for the special striking, which took place on August 12, 1925. (They were not brilliant or satin finish Proofs, just business strike presentation coins!). . .

Twelve years after the coins were issued B. Max Mehl commented: 'although the number distributed to collectors was fairly large, the coin has been very scarce for the past several years and seems to be in good demand with prices steadily on the upgrade.

In 1991 dealer Dwight Manley reported that he had been advised that a Southern California man owned a small hoard of about 400 pieces which had remained intact since the year of mintage.¹ This same individual also had hoards of other coins, including 1935-S and 1936-D San Diego half dollars (to which listings refer).

Standard original packaging: Apparently, none (a few were specially mounted in badges, but these were not standard packaging; others have been seen in unmarked leather packages of unattributed origin)"³

¹ Telephone conversation with the author, January 8, 1991.

³ *Commemorative Coins of the United States; A Complete Encyclopedia*, Q. David Bowers. Published by Bowers and Merena Galleries, Inc., Box 1224, Wolfeboro, NH 03894, 1991, p. 178-179.

FINAL FINANCIAL REPORT, CALIFORNIA'S DIAMOND JUBILEE

RECEIPTS

Subscription	\$126,116.94	
Concessions	8,677.61	
Queen	6,988.00	
Ball	9,448.50	
Grandstand	71,478.05	
Coin	38,698.77	
Program	1,534.25	
Miscellaneous	2,868.55	
Dawes Banquet	1,230.00	
		\$267,040.67

DISBURSEMENTS

Headquarters	\$ 17,666.81	
Publicity	13,505.50	
Army and Navy.....	2,427.66	
Lighting and Decorating.....	92,348.55	
Grand Ball	4,523.14	
Queen	3,910.03	
Reception	8,527.88	
Finance	2,478.70	
Badge	122.00	
Concessions	608.16	
Fashion Show	3,019.40	
Literary	779.75	
Grandstand	34,947.53	
Girls' Athletics	873.23	
State Fair	820.00	
Coin	271.72	
Federal Participation	398.10	
Foreign Participation	21.44	
Regatta	4,151.92	
Music	9,413.00	
Fireworks	6,284.07	
Religion	125.00	
N. S. Drill Team.....	328.90	
Program	5,299.07	
Auto Races	12.50	
Trophies	1,814.95	
Parade—General	293.54	
July 31 Parade.....	533.63	
September 9 Parade.....	15,513.92	
September 12 Parade.....	5,994.36	
Labor Day Parade.....	2,677.75	
Miscellaneous	4,209.65	
Refund to Subscribers.....	19,700.00	
Souvenirs	460.20	
		\$264,062.06

*Balance on hand.....\$ 2,978.61

JAMES A. BACIGALUPI, Treasurer.

San Francisco, June 1, 1927.

* Entire amount of balance on hand expended in publication and distribution of this book—The History of California's Diamond Jubilee.

page one hundred six



1925 California Diamond Jubilee Citizens Committee Ribbon.

Cornelius Vermeule writes: “Jo Mora’s combination of a miner panning for gold and a grizzly bear walking on a statuesque slab for the California half dollar of 1925 is one of America’s greatest works of numismatic art (fig. 182). The design is bold and effective. The types are large, simple, and worked out with folds of cloth for the miner’s shirt and trousers, felt for his hat, and leather for his boots. Muscles, bones, and tufts of fur express the massive determination of the bear. Within the limits of modern machine design, compositions such as this are about as much as can be expected of a die designer. To add to the boldness of the miner and the ursine companion, the field is unpolished—that is, it is left roughened as it appeared in the sculptor’s model. Lettering is effective too, because large and very small sizes are used. Placing is so skillfully handled that it seems hard to realize that all three required aphorisms, the statutory inscriptions, are included.”⁴



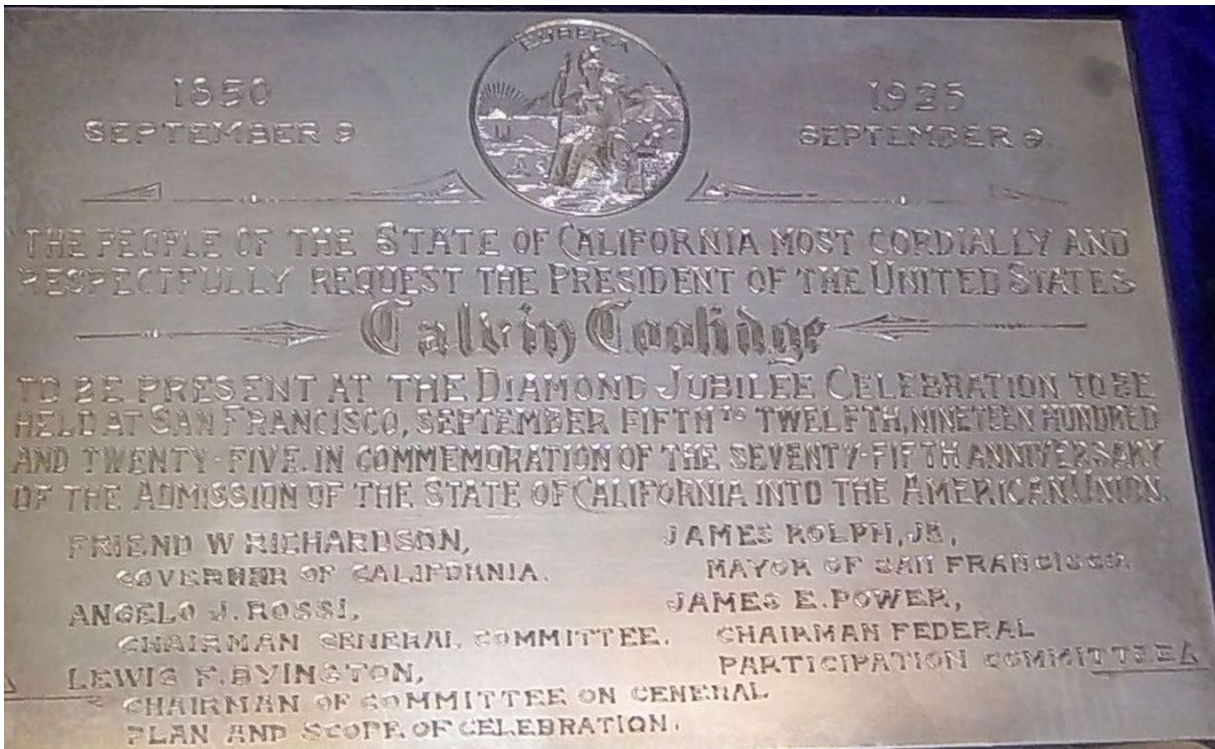
1925 California Diamond Jubilee Brass Watch Fob/Medal, 32mm, by Whitehead & Hoag.

⁴ *Numismatic Art In America; Aesthetics of the United States Coinage*, 2nd edition, Cornelius Vermeule, Whitman



Corenson's Shows, Diamond Jubilee - San Francisco, Calif. Courtesy SAN FRANCISCO HISTORY CENTER, SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC LIBRARY, Photo ID # AAB-3532.00





When it was learned that President Coolidge would be unable to cross the continent, as the Jubilee's guest, an impressive plaque of California gold was made and the official invitation of the committee inscribed thereon, as a fitting souvenir for the Chief executive.



Map artist Jacinto "Jo" Mora wears an artist's smock over his shirt and tie. Courtesy of the *La Jolla (CA) Light*, by Linda Hutchison, April 19, 2013.

"Joseph J. Mora Bio: Born on October 22, 1876, in Montevideo, Uruguay, the son of sculptor Domingo Mora, Jo Mora (as he was known professionally) came to the United States in his youth. He graduated from the Pingry Academy in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and subsequently studied at the Art Students League in New York City and at the Cowles Art School in Boston. Jo Mora began his career in art as an illustrator for *The Boston Traveler* newspaper and for various books. . .

In the 1920s he resided in Carmel, California and had a studio in nearby Pebble Beach. . .

Jo Mora died on October 10, 1947, in Monterey, California. He was survived by his widow, Mrs. Grace Needham Mora (of San Jose, California), a son, Joseph Jr. (of Monterey, and a daughter, Mrs. Patricia Janzan (of Pebble Beach)."⁵

⁵ *Commemorative Coins of the United States; A Complete Encyclopedia*, Q. David Bowers. Published by Bowers and Merena Galleries, Inc., Box 1224, Wolfeboro, NH 03894, 1991, p. 718-719.





Corner of Market and Fulton.





1925. California Diamond Jubilee pin-back badge. 45 x 35 mm. Bronze bear with a rhinestone attached. Very unusual and first such example we have seen. Courtesy Ira & Larry Goldberg Auctions.



Diamond Jubilee Celebration Arch erected in Civic Center



[PUBLIC—NO. 452—68TH CONGRESS]

[S. 3895]

An Act To authorize the coinage of silver 50-cent pieces in commemoration of the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Bennington and the independence of Vermont, in commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the admission of California into the Union and in commemoration of the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of Fort Vancouver, State of Washington.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That in commemoration of the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Bennington and the independence of Vermont there shall be coined in the mints of the United States silver 50-cent pieces to the number of forty thousand, such 50-cent pieces to be of the standard troy weight, composition, diameter, device, and design as shall be fixed by the Director of the Mint, with the approval of the Secretary of the Treasury, which said 50-cent pieces shall be legal tender in any payment to the amount of their face value.

SEC. 2. That in commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the admission of the State of California into the Union there shall be coined at the mints of the United States silver 50-cent pieces to the number of not more than three hundred thousand, such 50-cent pieces to be of the standard troy weight, composition, diameter, device, and design as shall be fixed by the Director of the Mint, with the approval of the Secretary of the Treasury, which said 50-cent pieces shall be legal tender in any payment to the amount of their face value.

The coins herein authorized by section 2 hereof shall be issued only upon the request of the San Francisco Clearing House Association and the Los Angeles Clearing House Association, or either of them, and upon payment by such associations, or either of them, to the United States of the par value of such coins.

SEC. 3. That in commemoration of the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of Fort Vancouver by the Hudson Bay Company, State of Washington, there shall be coined at the mints of the United States silver 50-cent pieces to the number of not more than three hundred thousand, such 50-cent pieces to be of the standard troy weight, composition, diameter, device, and design as shall be fixed by the Director of the Mint, with the approval of the Secretary of the Treasury, which said 50-cent pieces shall be legal tender in any payment to the amount of their face value.

That the coin herein authorized shall be issued only upon the request of the executive committee of the Fort Vancouver Centennial Corporation, of Vancouver, Washington, and upon payment by such executive committee for and on behalf of the Fort Vancouver Centennial Corporation of the par value of such coins, and it shall be permissible for the said Fort Vancouver Centennial

Corporation to obtain said coins upon said payment, all at one time or at separate times, and in separate amounts, as it may determine.

SEC. 4. All laws now in force relating to the subsidiary gold and silver coins of the United States and the coining or striking of the same, regulating and guarding the process of coinage, providing for the purchase of material and for the transportation, distribution, and redemption of coins, for the prevention of debasement or counterfeiting, for security of the coin, or for any other purposes, whether said laws are penal or otherwise, shall, so far as applicable, apply to the coinage herein authorized: *Provided*, That the United States shall not be subject to the expense of making the necessary dies and other preparations for this coinage.

Approved, February 24, 1925.